



## **NEWS FROM NOAA**

### **NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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#### **NOAA AWARDS \$54,834 FOR GEORGIA OYSTER HABITAT RESTORATION**

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration awarded \$54,834 to the University of Georgia Marine Extension Service (UGA MAREX) for a community-based project to restore oyster habitat in estuaries throughout coastal Georgia. The project is funded by the Community-based Restoration Program within NOAA Fisheries Service and the NOAA Coastal Services Center.

The project, Generating Enhanced Oyster Reefs in Georgia's Inshore Areas (G.E.O.R.G.I.A.), will build upon the previous success of UGA's oyster shell recycling and reef restoration program which set up shell recycling centers, and built five reefs in the greater Savannah area. This year's project will expand efforts beyond the Savannah area to Georgia's entire coast. In addition, the project involves constructing five publicly visible oyster reefs, and assisting waterfront property owners in building reefs and restoring oysters in their own backyards.

"The continued partnership between NOAA and the University of Georgia Marine Extension Service demonstrates our commitment to restore fisheries habitat," said retired Navy Vice Adm. Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator. "These habitat restoration efforts fit into our model of ecosystem-based management, and promote local stewardship of the habitats that sustain our nation's fishery resources."

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Georgia led the nation in oyster landings. However, harvest pressure, wetland loss, pollution and disease have fragmented this valuable resource. These impacts have put a strain on Georgia's fisheries in general, as oysters serve as a keystone species that support the overall health of Georgia's estuaries. The habitat provided by oysters is essential for a number of species, many of which are of commercial and economic significance. To begin the process of restoring Georgia's oysters, the UGA utilizes a local stewardship approach.

Alan Power, assistant research scientist at UGA MAREX said, "By engaging the public in hands-on restoration and outreach activities, we intend to enhance awareness of the importance of oyster habitat and make significant progress in revitalizing our state's oyster resources."

Used shell is collected from restaurants and public drop off centers. Volunteers help put the shell in mesh bags and later place the bags in pre-selected intertidal areas where juvenile oysters adhere to the shell and grow.

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The NOAA Restoration Center Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) is a financial and technical assistance program that promotes strong partnerships at the national, regional and local level to restore fisheries habitat. NOAA CRP works with organizations and government to support locally-driven habitat restoration projects in marine, estuarine and riparian areas. NOAA CRP funds on-the-ground habitat restoration projects that (1) offer educational and social benefits for citizens and their communities, and (2) provide long-term ecological benefits for fishery resources. Since 1996, more than 900 projects in 26 states have been implemented using NOAA funding and leveraged funding from national and regional habitat restoration partners.

Each year, NOAA awards approximately \$900 million in grants to members of the academic, scientific and business communities to assist the agency in fulfilling its mission to study the Earth's natural systems in order to predict environmental change, manage ocean resources, protect life and property, and provide decision makers with reliable scientific information. NOAA goals and programs reflect a commitment to these basic responsibilities of science and service to the nation for the past 35 years.

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

Community-based Restoration Program: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/restoration>